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ABSTRACT

An important support area for any summer migrant program is recruitment. Recruiters must be able to meet people comfortably, know and practice good human relations, and interpret the school's program and philosophy. After informing migrants of their purposes and program, recruiters must develop a relationship with the migrants. How recruiters and migrants respond to each other, work together, and confront problems will determine the recruiting program's productivity and success. Recruiters must have information that will be useful to other family members and be prepared to deal with the many problems that plague migrant agricultural workers. Since recruiters will sometimes have to serve as liaison between the migrant and community agencies, they must know those agencies and establish rapport with them. Recruiters also must work within a flexible time frame because many activities cannot be carried on during the regular nine-to-five, 5-day work week. Therefore, to gain and maintain productive relationships, recruiters should be approachable; establish trust; contact as many parents and adults as possible to encourage their participation and support; be loving and firm with the children, but not stern; provide assistance wherever and whenever needed; and arrange expendable supplies, materials, and job-related equipment so that they are easily accessible. (NQA)

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STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITING MIGRANT CHILDREN

How to Find Them, Win Them, Keep Them

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BACKGROUND

During the summer of 1968, we in Accomack County, on Virginia's historic Eastern Shore, decided to extend our program of migrant services in the hope of reaching migrant children and youths who either could not or would not attend the summer day school. Our plan was to take the program to prospective students, and thus arouse their interest in attending school.

Armed with first-aid supplies, borrowed classroom materials, and equipment from current school programs, one untitled professional—myself—and a driver/aide set out for the larger migrant farm labor camps on the Shore. The areas extended from Cheapside on the southern end of the Shore to New Church at the northern end, within easy walking distance of the Maryland state line.

Two initial tasks were given to us: to establish rapport with the migrant population, and to serve as liaison between the migrant labor camp and the school. Almost as an afterthought, we realized our work would be governed by one condition: it would have to begin in the evenings after the laborers had come from the fields and graders, and after the children had come in from the schools and day care centers.

It should be noted here that although the Eastern Shore has Virginia's largest concentration of migrant agricultural workers—more than 12,000 persons are estimated to work here during peak years—I had never been to a labor camp! Horror tales of dangers, violence, and corruption were enough to keep people braver than I away. I had heard these tales from many people and began the new job with much fear and trembling.

The initial schedule required working a six-day week and traveling a distance of approximately 75 miles from the first camp on Monday to the last camp on Saturday. Four of the camps were the largest on the Eastern Shore. (During one summer, 110 children were registered for our school program at one camp alone!)

The school system, the Virginia Council of Churches, and the Migrant Health Project were the only agencies providing direct services to migrants, and our bus was the only vehicle among them. Thus, the bus represented the local public presence and we were soon involved with many problems in addition to those we had undertaken. We had to interpret the programs of the other agencies as well as programs offered by the public schools. Therefore we initiated and maintained contact with these community agencies and with later ones as they were established. In addition to making available to adults all

agency services available to children, we also accepted the responsibility for making numerous referrals to the agencies.

In the beginning, typical labor camps were very depressing: the housing was cramped and the buildings were dilapidated; the water supply was inadequate; the toilet facilities threatened epidemics. Hopelessness prevailed. There were constant fights among children and adults and families; children were dirty, diseased, and ill-fed; there was open gambling; both children and adults exhibited a complete lack of self-control.

Over the past 13 years, our efforts have not provided all of the answers. But there has been visible improvement. Today, I observe pride and self-confidence, family stability, secure peer relationships. There are also unusually healthy children, young people with good work and study habits, and persons who show faith in the future as evidenced by their orientation toward lifetime goals. Many of them now consider those who are not migrants—who do not "go on the season"—as those who are deprived.

During the 13 years of our recruiting program, we have conducted business in individual houses, between houses, and within large and small private and public camps. We have made well over 400 visits to camps and spent countless hours there. In all these years and during all these visits, we were not once subjected to personal violence. We have had to leave a camp only twice--both times because of incidents at the same camp.

We can tell many, many stories of the good and exciting things that have happened, and we can rejoice at the many friends we have made.

PURPOSE

The success we have had with our program was not achieved on the first or second visit. We worked long and hard to build the type of relationship which today allows us to come and go at labor camps without restriction.

No longer do we have to rely on printed matter to publicize our activities. The children, youth, parents, and other adults tell each other about who we are and what we do. It is now possible for us to go to a labor camp in some areas and register all the children without asking a single name because we know everybody.

What have we done that was so special:

Although we did not knowingly establish such a goal in the beginning, we have traced our success to what has been termed a "humanistic" approach.

We began to realize that many people had failed to treat migrants as human beings who had joys, hurts, and concerns like the rest of us, and who needed not only to receive attention but also to give of themselves in order to survive. We have found that migrants, like other people, live their lives in relationship to others and that what they had become or would become was mainly the result of those relationships.

The information in this booklet is not meant to be definitive. There are many people who have worked as recruiters from the beginning of the migrant program, and some who are still working, who possess as much knowledge of recruitment techniques and who are just as successful as we. We are passing this advice on to the beginner who may be just starting his or her career in migrant education. Our aim is to allay fears and, it is hoped, to suggest recruitment procedures that will prove effective.

DEVELOPING THE RELATIONSHIP

You can't expect to go into labor camps, inform migrants of your purposes, explain your program, and have them respond instantly to your appeal; this just does not happen. Migrants do not cooperate readily until your relationship with them has been carefully nurtured through the maze of problems that will surely come.

Many of the migrants will be full of questions, most of which will relate to understanding the program you represent. Many will have questions about such things as support services, transportation, and hours of operation. However, their questions reflect social concerns too. They want to know how they are going to be accepted by both the teacher and the other students, and how they are going to fit into the classroom. The recruiter can tell prospective students what can be expected to happen in the classroom, and can counsel other educational professionals in ways to help the youngsters get acquainted with each other.

Once orientation has been completed, the recruiter can begin work in establishing rapport with those he or she has set out to serve. The manner in which recruiter and migrants respond to each other, work together, and confront problems will determine the productivity and success of the recruiting program.

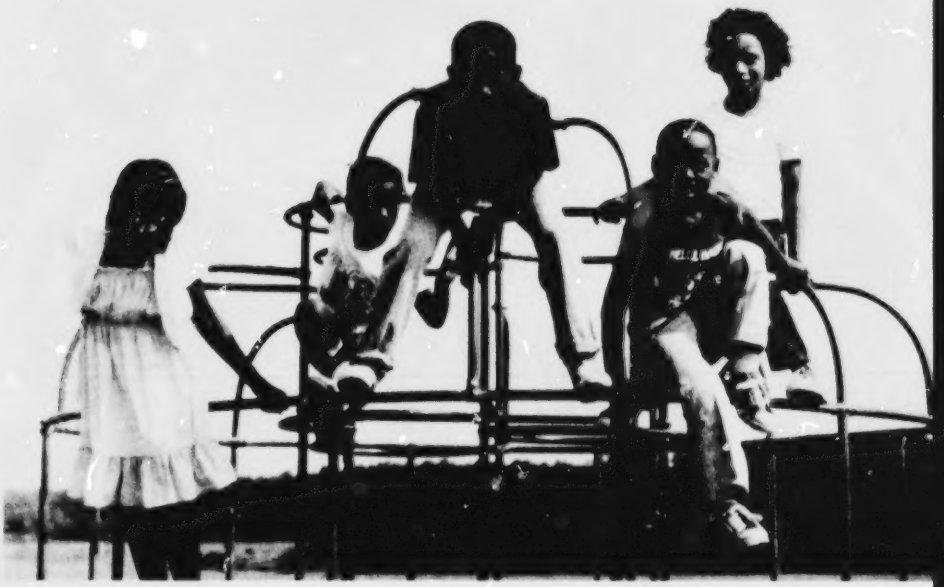
As the weeks progress, the recruiter will find that he or she will be able to communicate more openly and directly. The recruiter, as the school or institution's presence in the migrant community, will be extremely helpful in resolving interpersonal conflicts. He or she will hear many tales about the classroom, about the program, the food, the transportation. The recruiter can help by providing support and reassurance and by listening.

Even when summer is over and most of the migrant population has left the area, the Eastern Shore recruiting effort continues in hopes of attracting students for the regular school session.

STRATEGIES IN RECRUITING

More and more, persons who work with children of migrant agricultural workers are realizing that the migrant child has changed. No longer is that child identifiable as the ill-clothed, ill-fed, and diseased migrant of yesteryear.

Today, migrant children can give the critical information—birth, home state, and parent—needed to document their presence in an area. Many of these youngsters can perform in various settings with little or no difficulty. Teachers and other professionals must search constantly for something "new" to interest and challenge them.



Migrant parents are also different. They may be younger and may have been less discriminated against than their own parents, and are likely to have had more schooling, and to be better informed than the preceding generation. These young parents are likely to have participated in early migrant education programs and thus to have been subject to a variety of experimental programs, some of them not beneficial.

Not only have the children and their parents changed, but the labor camps themselves have changed. They are apt to be more sanitary and less dangerous; they may represent many cultures. The influx of Cuban and Haitian refugees

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means that workers in the camps need to be bilingual or even trilingual. The labor camp of several years ago that had only minimal social services has been replaced by camps that now receive a multitude of services. The migrants at these camps may have received the benefits of these services in other states and may seek to have them continued as they make their way up and down the country.

Camps used to be inhabited by those who had few or no alternatives. Now, an overwhelming number of migrants have high school diplomas and have completed college or technical school courses; some even have college degrees. Persons now missing from the migrant labor force have joined the stable, year-round labor market. Young migrants today are requesting courses that will provide essential life and job-entry skills.

Ten years ago, the services available to migrants were extremely limited. Today, however, there is danger of duplication of efforts avoided only by close interagency cooperation and coordination. In some camps, migrants can be overserved, while in less organized camps they still are underserved. The numerous services now available to the transient population have been the cause of criticism from growers and other members of the community.

The advice of migrants is being sought and, in some instances, required by various agencies wanting to establish guidelines. This is a healthy sign. It is only reasonable that those who are to be served should have a voice in determining the kinds of services they need and want.

To serve migrants effectively, the recruiter must be well informed and aware of these changes. To try to recruit migrant young people without having information that will be useful to the other members of the family as well is to be unprepared.

Recruiting requires teamwork. The recruiter must be prepared to deal with the many problems that plague migrant agricultural workers. As the recruiter will have to serve very often as liaison between the migrant and community agencies, it is wise that he or she know those agencies and establish rapport with them. A recruiter will find the task of getting the right service for the right person at the right time much easier if he or she has contacted community, civic, and social agencies and has made known a desire to cooperate with them.

No single agency can provide all the answers and solutions that confront migrant agricultural workers.

Recruiters also must work within a flexible time frame: there are many activities that cannot be carried on during the regular nine to five, five-day work week. Early mornings, evenings, even Saturdays and Sundays must be spent at the camps, enrolling students and encouraging participation in migrant programs.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR ESTABLISHING PRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Any person, regardless of race, creed, religious affiliation, or national origin, who is to gain and maintain the confidence of migrants at labor camps must be guided by certain basic principles. These will be no different from those followed by successful persons in a variety of other "helping" or support services.

The following suggestions should be useful in gaining and maintaining productive relationships. They will not assure success, but we can testify that they worked for us.

1. Be approachable.
2. Establish trust.
3. Contact as many parents and adults as possible to encourage their participation and support.
4. Be loving and firm with the children, but not stern.
5. Provide assistance wherever and whenever needed.
6. Arrange expendable supplies, materials, and job-related equipment so that they are easily accessible.

Be approachable

We had occasion to observe a recruiter who had parked at the entrance to a large labor camp. The recruiter's car had been spit-shined and his carefully coordinated clothes indicated they had been bought at one of the finer men's shops. As natural curiosity overcame the children, they began to ask the recruiter questions, pull at his clothes, and jump on his car. He became upset and moved away, only to have the children follow him, still asking countless questions. His effectiveness had been impaired because he had not been ready for such a reception. Further, his appearance spoke far more loudly to those who were sitting and watching than all the words he would say afterward.

While it is very important that recruiters take their work seriously, and that the specialized nature of their work be appreciated, it is far more important that prospective students feel free to approach them. It is very often through the nonverbal communication that we are able to communicate verbally. Every recruiter needs to know that many of the migrants have survived by being perceptive judges of human nature and that others also have experienced some of the most adverse social situations. Nevertheless, many have an unusually good outlook on life and have personalities that adapt easily to new situations.

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To realize these things, the recruiter has to become an open, accepting individual.

We cannot teach or otherwise serve migrant children unless we can reach them. We will not reach them unless we can overcome their reticence and fears by the openness of our personalities.

Establish trust

Once communication has been established, and the recruiter has purchased some sensible work clothes, it is possible to move a step further in the relationship. The fact that the recruiter has a service to offer and the migrant has a need for that service does not by any means assure a meaningful relationship. Mutual trust is necessary. This can be established in many ways.

If the recruiter does not know the provider of a particular service, he or she should admit this fact to the migrant. Then he or she should attempt to find out the information and to give the assistance needed. Such action nurtures the recruiter-migrant relationship.

When the recruiter is as good as his or her word (and this may require writing down things that are easily forgotten), the relationship is strengthened.

The recruiter must operate in an open and above-board fashion. The relationship cannot be sustained on half-truths and misinformation. Moreover, the recruiter must show those he or she is working with the respect he or she wishes to receive if the association is to flourish.

When the recruiter is invited to dinner, offered gifts from the harvest, asked for advice on obviously simple matters, or otherwise made to feel needed or important, these overtures serve as verbal and nonverbal cues indicating a healthy, trusting relationship.

Contact as many parents and adults as possible to encourage their participation and support

Once the migrants know who the recruiter is and what he or she does, and there are no misgivings about ulterior motives, the recruiter can engage in outreach activities.

While the institution of the family may be vanishing from some areas of society, the concept is alive and well and thriving in migrant labor camps. For this reason, the contacts of the recruiter should include, in addition to natural parents, other adults who may be serving as temporary parents during the summer months.

From time to time, solicit the support of the adults. Encourage their suggestions, then pass them on to those who must plan and administer the school program. Through such contacts, the recruiter will open doors to a more successful second year of recruiting activities.

Be loving and firm with the children, but not stern.

Children are known for their honesty in dealing with adults; they are reputed to be good judges of character. Therefore, parents observe the manner in which their children respond to certain adults. Thus, recruiters may be avoided by adults if the recruiters are unable to get along with their children.

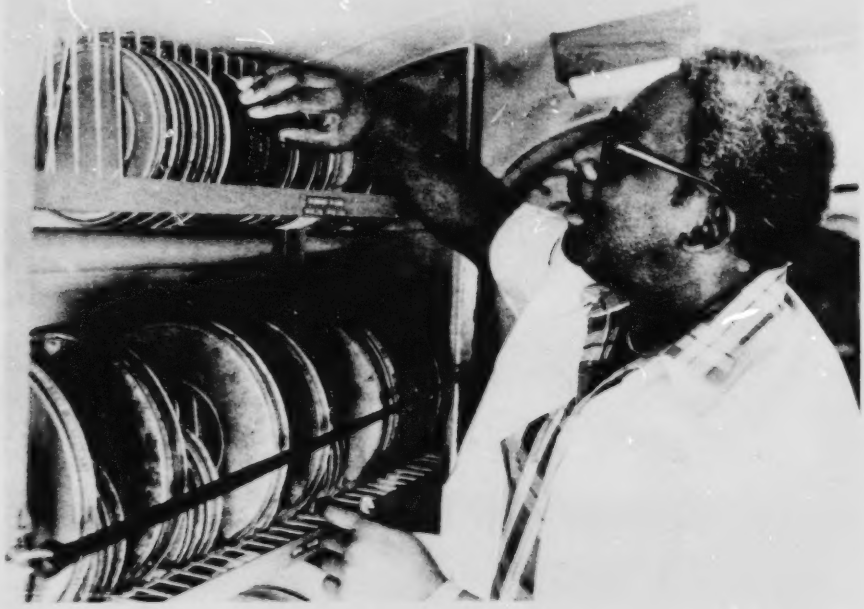
Migrant adults are appreciative of a firm but loving attitude toward children. In fact, many will observe the recruiter in a number of situations that he or she may not even be aware of. If the recruiter fails these "tests", the failure will become obvious.

Migrant parents are no different from parents in a stable community in establishing goals for their children. The class philosophy of parents is repeated from generation to generation: "I don't want my child to come up the way I did." Yet these parents also realize that there are limits to what the children can do—that there are times when the best demonstration of love and concern is simply "no."

If you endure, there will come a time when more and more offsprings will be placed in your arms, when you will be encouraged to hold, admire, look for resemblances, and even to kiss, as do aspiring politicians!

Provide assistance wherever and whenever needed.

A recruiter is clearly "one of the crew" when he or she is asked by migrants to take care of personal matters. The request may be to dial or locate a telephone number for an elderly or inebriated person; or it may be to write a letter. Some of the younger migrants may request help in getting a Social Security card or a driver's license. A parent may even request help in talking with a youth who seems to be headed in the wrong direction. At times, the recruiter may need to provide transportation for those with special health and medical needs.



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On other occasions, the recruiter may be called in to arbitrate philosophical disputes. I once refereed an argument about whether wind or water was more destructive.

Another time, I listened to a very long and involved tale from a gentleman who had broken away from a road gang years earlier and who then wanted to turn himself in. I was literally shoved into the phone booth and ordered to make the call. We never did get through to the prison because I deliberately dialed the number at the phone booth. Common sense dictated that, once the effects of the wine had worn off, the penitent would view turning himself in from a different perspective.

After all, providing assistance is one thing but being foolish is another.

Arrange expendable supplies, materials, and job-related equipment so that they are easily accessible.

We have stated before that nonverbal signals are as significant as verbal ones. This is particularly evident if you share leaflets, books, and audiovisual equipment with migrants in labor camps. If there are items to be given away, let it be known. Place these things where they will be accessible to all, and then move on to another task.

If a tape recorder is used to record information about the children, don't act as if the migrants are seeing such a machine for the first time. Whenever we have used the tape recorder to get names and ages, we have told one of the young people what we wanted, given a quickie demonstration of how that particular recorder operates, and then turned the youngster loose to get the information. As a result, of course, the tape may have information that is extraneous; however, it also will contain the hard data you sent for.

We are fortunate in that we traveled to many camps, carried a large inventory of supplies and equipment, and lost very little. Crew leaders, parents, children, and other interested adults have retrieved lost and strayed items for us. We established a routine whereby all games, toys, and crafts were returned before the night's movie started. As a result, we have had unusual success in controlling and managing our inventory without seeming repressive. Furthermore, we try to make the children aware of the concept of sharing.

SUMMARY

As summer school attendance is not compulsory, response from the migrant community to the summer school program depends on various procedures to provide an enrollment that justifies the operation.

One of the most important support areas for any summer migrant program is recruitment. Because recruiters must cross cultural and racial lines, they must be persons who are able, first of all, to meet people comfortably; who know and practice good human relations; and who can interpret the school's program and philosophy.

Even after the recruiter has secured an appreciable number of students for enrollment, the success of a program is not assured. Much will depend on the dedicated professionals at the migrant educational centers. The key to keeping enrollees in school is the quality of the program. Consequently, recruitment is a cooperative endeavor involving camp personnel, the recruiter, the school and school support personnel.

We are proud of what we have done for our students. We have certain tangible and visible evidence of our success: this second generation with which we are working will not have to suffer through the trial-and-error period of early migrant education programs. Parents today are no longer as powerless, hopeless, or trapped as they were in the previous generation. Youths today have options that were not available years ago.

These young people come with certain other strengths: they very likely have heard of the program before crossing the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel; more and more of them are familiar with the teachers, the schools, and the curriculum and therefore move comfortably and easily within the class. These children's aspirations will be higher than the aspirations of those before them.

We include here a profile of the migrant student of the '80s. The implications are great for the recruiter and especially for the teaching personnel.

1. The migrant child of the '80s will be in unusually good health. It seems reasonable to assume that there is hardly a disease known to man against which they have not been immunized. Further, both the young people and their parents also may know of each immunization they have received.

2. These children will know where they are, where they came from, and the routes they traveled to get here. In the beginning years of migrant education, many of the young people had difficulty identifying home states or current locations.

3. Some of these children will have written their own books, produced their own movies, and expressed their creativity in other unusual ways.

4. Some of these children will be bilingual and others will even be trilingual.

5. These children will be test-conscious.

6. These children may be overschooled. This does not mean overeducated; it does mean that they may have participated in some type of schooling in every locality in which they have lived and therefore may not take education as seriously as they should.

7. These young people will know their rights and will demand to know what they will receive in return for their presence in your program.

8. These young people may have participated in a program more or less sophisticated than the one your division is offering. Treat them accordingly.

9. The parents of migrant children of the '80s will want to be more involved in decisions which affect their children's schooling.

The recruitment process is not completed when the parent signs a form authorizing enrollment and the child appears at the school door. The recruitment process is a cooperative and continuous one. Even when the child has left Virginia to enter another state and another school, the tracking and reporting capabilities of the Migrant Student Record Transfer System go into motion. Furthermore, the recruiter must continue building on earlier relationships to strengthen those important contacts.

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